

By Rep. Steve King

Having lived in western Iowa for my entire life, I have witnessed several major ice storms. However, the January 20, 2010 storm was truly one for the ages.

A unique weather combination of frosty fog, heavy rainfall and optimum temperature to facilitate ice buildup provided Mother Nature with the perfect setting to turn several counties in west central Iowa into an icy wonderland. Although the beauty of the landscape was stunning, the weight of the ice was more than many roofs, trees, power lines and power poles could withstand.

As the amount of ice grew, most of our homes and farms succumbed to the ice and went dark. The sounds of televisions, radios, furnaces and refrigerators were replaced by the sounds of limbs and branches crackling due to massive ice buildup.

Ice storms vary in their intensity but the one constant to these storms is the resilient capacity of our citizens to get their lives, farms and communities back to normal following the storms. In the days following January 20, I saw this capacity firsthand throughout western Iowa.

As I traveled through the hardest hit areas in western Iowa on January 22, I connected with many folks and was able to get a first hand look at the recovery effort. What I saw impressed me greatly.

I talked to Doug Harris, the new city manager in Atlantic, who was directing an effort to clean up debris with city crews. These crews were receiving help from a chain saw group and prisoners from our correctional facilities, teaming together to clean up after the storm.

I spoke with Sac City Mayor Barb Bloes, who was assisting residents staying at a warming center in her community. Carroll was probably hit the hardest by the storm, but by Saturday, power was back on and the city had opened its arms to an army of electrical workers from many states.

Efforts in rural areas were equally impressive. Farmers used their loaders to move the snow and their tractors to pull electrical trucks through fields so line crews could replace broken poles and restring electrical lines. I talked to a crew from the Kansas City Power and Light Company, and they reiterated that the job

could not have been done without help from local farmers. While farmers were clearing the way for these crews, they also were spending long hours babysitting generators to keep their homes and livestock comfortable.

The ice storm practically crippled the infrastructure of our REC's. The Raccoon River REC had nearly 1,000 poles to replace and all but a handful of their 2,700 customers were out of power at one time or another. The story was similar for several other REC's. It took a herculean effort in tough weather conditions to get those thousands of customers back on line.

As the length of time the power was out increased, so did the lengths to which our citizens went to help their neighbors and communities. Volunteer fireman went door to door to check on citizens, numerous neighbors delivered meals to shut-ins, snowmobilers checked for downed lines on unplowed low service roads and pharmacists delivered oxygen to dependent customers.

With a storm of this magnitude, government assistance is certainly warranted, and I have asked the President to approve the Public Assistance Declaration. I also applaud the efforts of our local governments in dealing with the storm.

While there is still much work to be done, we cannot possibly calculate the value of the work already accomplished by our private citizens. Even an ice storm of historic proportions is no match for western lowans with resilient attitudes, strong work ethics and great pride in our communities.